



SOCIAL MEDIA FOR EMPLOYEES POLICY

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Social media is an important communication tool for the Council, but it is not without risks. Boundaries that exist in the “real world” can be easily blurred online.
- 1.2. This Policy:
 - Explains what we mean by the term “social media.”
 - Sets out the standards of behaviour expected of employees when using social media, both personally and in their public role.
 - Sets out the implications if those standards are not met.
- 1.3. This Policy applies to all employees of Cowbridge with Llanblethian Town Council. It also applies when employees are seen to be associated with the Council in any way online.

2. What is “Social Media”?

- 2.1. Social media includes online communications and applications through which messages, opinions, and media can be shared and discussed.
- 2.2. Examples include (but are not limited to):
 - Social networks: Facebook, LinkedIn, X (Twitter).
 - Media sharing networks: Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat.
 - Discussion forums: Reddit, Mumsnet.
 - Consumer review networks: TripAdvisor, Google Reviews.
 - Blogs and microblogs: WordPress, Medium, personal websites.

3. Principles for Employees

- 3.1. When using social media, employees must:
 - Act in accordance with their contract of employment, such as, but not limited to, Confidentiality and Misconduct.
 - Treat others with respect, including staff, contractors, councillors, and members of the public.
 - Avoid bringing the Council into disrepute.
 - Recognise that they are representatives of the Council, even on personal accounts.

- Clearly distinguish between personal opinions and official Council statements.

4. What Can Be Shared on Social Media?

- 4.1. Information should be shared through the Council's official channels. If employees would like something shared, they should make a request to the Chief Officer.
- 4.2. The Council has collectively agreed that its official social media accounts may be used to share details of local events - including commercial or for-profit events - where they are judged to drive positive footfall to Cowbridge and support the vibrancy of the town.
- 4.3. All posts should remain factual, impartial, and supportive, without giving undue preference to individual businesses.

5. Official vs. Personal Facebook Use

- 5.1. The Council's official Facebook page is the primary channel for official announcements and communications.
- 5.2. Employees are encouraged to share posts from the official page to their own personal pages to increase visibility and reach.
- 5.3. If employees post factual information directly on their own accounts, they must:
 - Ensure the information is already public.
 - Avoid wording that could be misinterpreted as an official Council statement.
 - Not add commentary that undermines staff, contractors, councillors, or the Council itself.

6. Prohibited Use

- 6.1. Employees must not use social media to:
 - Criticise, ridicule, or personally attack Council staff, contractors, councillors, community groups or members of the public.
 - Publish statements that could amount to harassment, bullying, or defamation.
 - Disclose confidential information.
 - Misrepresent themselves as speaking on behalf of the Council, unless authorised.
 - Use inflammatory or aggressive language.

- Post misleading, discriminatory, offensive, or otherwise inappropriate content.

Important: Employees must never publicly criticise staff, contractors or councillors in a public forum (such as Facebook). This is because the unmonitored comments that follow can amount to workplace harassment or bullying, and employees have a duty to avoid creating situations that expose others to harassment.

7. Staff and Contractors

- 7.1. Council staff (including the Chief Officer) are employees of the Council, and contractors are engaged to provide services.
- 7.2. Both are entitled to dignity and respect.
- 7.3. Public criticism of staff or contractors on social media is considered harassment and bullying. This behaviour is unacceptable, may breach Employment Law, and could expose the Council to legal liability.
- 7.4. The Council has a legal duty of care to protect staff and contractors from harassment and bullying.

8. Free Speech and Employee Conduct

- 8.1. Employees do have the right to free expression under law, but this is a qualified right and does not override their duties under their employment contract.
- 8.2. Employees may legitimately criticise Council policies, decisions, or spending choices, but this must be done through formal Council processes (meetings, committees, correspondence), rather than on social media.
- 8.3. Personal attacks on staff, contractors, councillors or the Council as an organisation via social media are not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

9. Business Use of Social Media

- 9.1. When posting on official Council channels or as a representative of the Council, employees must:
 - Communicate in a professional, respectful manner.
 - Avoid slang, rudeness, or inflammatory remarks.
 - Only comment on matters within their knowledge or remit.

- Check spelling and grammar before posting.
- Avoid posting anything confidential or sensitive.
- Ensure posts are factual, accurate, and relevant to the Council's work.

10. Handling Concerns or Complaints

- 10.1. Any concerns about Council staff, contractors, councillors or services of the Council must be raised through the proper internal channels (e.g. Mayor, Chair of the Staffing Committee or Chief Officer).
- 10.2. Complaints must never be raised through social media.

11. Breach of Policy

- 11.1. If an employee is found to have breached this policy:
- Informal Action – The Mayor, Chair of the Staffing Committee or Chief Officer may request removal of the offending post and remind the employees of this Policy and their responsibilities.
 - Formal Complaint – The matter may be referred to The Mayor, Chair of the Staffing Committee, Chief Officer or the Council's HR Advisors for investigation.
- 11.2. Following investigation, the employee may be required to, but not limited to:
- Provide a written or public apology.
 - Remove offending content.
 - Undertake training.
 - Attend disciplinary proceedings, which could potentially lead to dismissal.

Note: Serious or repeated breaches could expose the Council to Employment Law claims if staff or contractors are subjected to harassment or bullying.

12. Monitoring & Review

- 12.1. The Council may monitor public social media posts where employees are identifiable as representatives of the Council.
- 12.2. This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if required.